



Linking Gender Policy and Climate Finance

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By Dr. Gabriel Chan, Lindsey Forsberg, Peder Garnaas-Halvorsen, and Samantha Holte

CONTACT Gabriel Chan | gabechan@umn.edu

OVERVIEW

The goal of gender equity is increasingly linked to climate change policy under the assumption that this “issue linkage” will produce important synergies and co-benefits. While the logic and practice of the gender-climate linkage has been critiqued, it has become prominent in international climate change institutions. Various climate funds (e.g. Green Climate Fund, Climate Investment Funds) have adopted policies requiring or encouraging gender mainstreaming or the inclusion of gender co-benefits in projects they fund. Such policies aim to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of improving both gender and climate outcomes, but little has been done to evaluate the capacity of climate change institutions to realize these dual goals. Here we summarize lessons learned from gender mainstreaming in the development sector as well as questions raised by current practices in climate change regarding the advantages, limitations, and best practices for integrating the goals of gender equity and international climate change policy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent has gender been mainstreamed in bilateral and multilateral climate funds? What reasons are given for mainstreaming?
- Has gender mainstreaming in climate funds affected the political or institutional feasibility of project implementation?
- How has gender mainstreaming affected both gender equity and climate outcomes? How are these outcomes being evaluated at the project and fund levels?

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Gender mainstreaming, or the integration of gender perspectives into all policies and throughout the policymaking process, grew from the 1970s onward as women, gender relations, and economic development became conceptually linked as a method of advancing gender equality worldwide. The Beijing Platform for Action from the 1995 UN World Conference on Women highlighted the inclusion of gender

perspectives across a variety of policy arenas, including education, health, economy, and human rights¹. Gender has since been mainstreamed into the decision making of bilateral and multilateral development aid institutions, NGOs, and national governments.

Gender mainstreaming across policy arenas and institutions faces two main critiques. First, some argue that gender mainstreaming integrates or co-opts gender into the status quo rather than transforming institutions to advance gender equity goals². An alternative, transformative approach would promote participatory, bottom-up methods of policymaking where disempowered groups set the agenda for institutional or policy change. The second critique cites the gap between the rhetorical commitment of gender mainstreaming written into policies and the measurable outcomes of improved gender equity in the implementation of these policies³. The gap between policy and implementation is complicated by differences in the conceptualization of gender mainstreaming and gender equity; difficulties in evaluating indicators through the lens of gender; and institutional practices that emphasize other goals at the expense of gender. Measurement of gender equity indicators is essential to quantifying project results and determining the gap between policy, implementation, and outcomes. However, it is argued that the most important strategy to overcome the difficulties of gender mainstreaming is forming institutional consensus that highlights gender equity as a policy objective rather than using gender mainstreaming merely as a tool in organizational processes⁴.

GENDER-CLIMATE LINKAGE

The linkage of women and the environment emerged in the development context from ecofeminist philosophy which characterized women as spiritually linked to the environment, the “givers of life” and thus the “rightful caretaker[s] of nature”⁵. Scholars have criticized this narrative for over-generalizing women’s roles and for placing more burdens on women, but the linkage has persisted in environmental discourse. During the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the women-environment link was formalized, with a call for specific programming involving women as key stakeholders in environmental conservation and sustainability efforts.

Although the women-environment linkage was initially missing from international climate change discussions, a narrative around gender gradually emerged in the climate regime in parallel to deepening linkages between climate and a broader set of social issues⁶. The narrative claims that women are fundamentally more vulnerable to climate change due to a strong connection with and reliance on natural resources that are affected by climate change; constraining gender roles that leave women less able to survive natural disasters and other climate impacts; and a higher prevalence of poverty that constrains climate adaptation possibilities⁷. The hypothesis that women are both natural environmental stewards and more vulnerable to climate change impacts is often cited as the impetus for gender mainstreaming in climate change institutions. However, the narrative of inherent female vulnerability has been criticized for its basis in unverified statistics and generalizations, and for its conflation of gender as the cause of vulnerability⁸. Nevertheless, the portrayal of women as the “vulnerable victims” of climate change has gained traction, and continues to persist in the multilateral climate regime.

FRAMING CONCEPTS

The increasing acceptance of the gender-climate linkage is reflected in the development of gender policies in many—but not all—multilateral and bilateral climate funds⁹. As a critical mechanism for the multilateral regime to more equitably and effectively respond to climate change, these funds represent a potentially transformational force in international development. But they have faced significant challenges during their inception and initial implementation. The growth and evolving practices of multilateral climate funds makes it critical to develop an understanding of how they are used and could be made more effective. A critical lens has not yet been systematically applied in the literature to examine the complementarities, conflicts, and best practices of promoting gender equity in climate change finance.

Climate funds may have institutional advantages for pursuing the goal of gender equity. Integration of climate change policy in all levels of governance may provide **a more effective vehicle** for gender policies than traditional development aid¹⁰. Including gender considerations in mitigation and adaptation projects may also lead to more **inclusivity and buy-in** from communities, increasing the sustainability of these projects. Finally, synergistically linking multiple objectives may lead to a more **efficient use of resources** in addressing both gender equity and climate change.

On the other hand, climate funds may have certain limitations in effectively linking the goals of gender equity and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Linking gender to climate may lead to **double counting** of official development assistance that leads to less financing for gender or climate initiatives. Gender considerations in all climate projects may lead to the selection of projects with the highest level of social co-benefits—but not the highest climate impact—creating **inefficiency** in pursuing climate goals. Finally, implementing

gender initiatives in projects without the appropriate expertise and oversight may lead to **nominal gender mainstreaming** without fully realizing the goal of gender equity.

CONTINUING QUESTIONS

As we move forward with our research, we are interested in incorporating insights from experts and practitioners in the fields of climate finance and gender mainstreaming on the following questions:

- Does gender mainstreaming have an impact on the effectiveness of climate change mitigation and adaptation?
- Are there potential gender-norm conflicts created when setting gender policies at the international level that are implemented at the national level?
- What is the body of evidence supporting the incorporation of gender policies on the grounds of vulnerability, systematic inequalities, specialized societal roles, and/or political feasibility?
- What are the advantages and limitations of climate funds in pursuing the goal of gender equity?
- What funds or practices stand out for effectively implementing gender-responsive climate policies?

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The views expressed in this brief are the views of the authors and not the University of Minnesota or the Center for Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy. We hope to contribute to the dialogue on developing frames for understanding and evaluating the linkage of gender policy and climate finance and welcome all comments.

A full paper on the ideas in this brief will be available in 2018. Please contact gabechan@umn.edu for a copy.